

312 Smallridge Building  
Charleston W. Va.

August 31, 1937

The Manager  
The Pocahontas Tanning Co.  
Frank, W. Va.

Dear Sir:

For inclusion in the West Virginia section of the American Guide, being prepared by the Federal Writers' Project, we would like the following information.

Comparatively speaking, how large is the tanning company? One of our field workers states that it is the largest in the world. How many workers are employed?

What is manufactured? If raw materials, where and for what are they used? Are materials used in the plant readily available in the vicinity or must they be imported?

Is this a West Virginia concern or is it owned by outside interests?

Are visitors allowed to go through the plant?

What factors led to the location of the plant in this comparatively isolated neighborhood?

Is the town of Frank company owned? Are the workers' homes company owned?

A section of the West Virginia Guide will consist of highway tours, one of them being a tour of US 250. The Pocahontas Tanning Company, being a large plant and situated in a section where there are no other manufacturies, deserves mention as a point of interest. For this reason we naturally wish out information to be accurate and will appreciate any material which you can let us have,

Sincerely yours,

Assistant State Editor

# POCAHONTAS TANNING CO.

H. M. WIDNEY, SUPERINTENDENT

## TANNERS

RAILROAD STATION, TELEGRAPH AND  
AMERICAN EXPRESS OFFICES, DURBIN,  
POCAHONTAS COUNTY, W. VA.  
C. & O. AND W. MD. RAILWAYS

POSTOFFICE: FRANK, (POCAHONTAS COUNTY) W. VA. Sept. 8th, 1937

Miss Margaret C. Williamson, Ass't. State Editor,  
W. P. A.,  
Charleston, West Va.

Madam:-

We acknowledge receipt of your letter of 31st, ult., and would answer your questions as follows:-

✓ The Durbin Tannery of the Pocahontas Tanning Co., is probably the second largest tannery in the U. S. A., both in floor space and production, devoted entirely to the production of sole leather. Recent enlargements of competitive plants does not give us definite information on this subject at this time.

✓ Manufactured products are SOLE LEATHER for the purpose of building new shoes. By-products are Washed Cattle Hair used in floor coverings, insulation felts and many styles of felt padding. Glue stock used for the manufacture of glues and also greases.

Raw Hides are obtained from the Packing Centers of the USA, South America, Mexico, Australia and Europe.  
Tanning Materials are procured in USA, South America, Africa, Philippine Islands, Turkey and India, and local Hemlock and Oak barks from the West Virginia Forests.

The Pocahontas Tanning Co., is a West Virginia Corporation with Main Office at Main and 24th Sts., Wheeling, West Va.

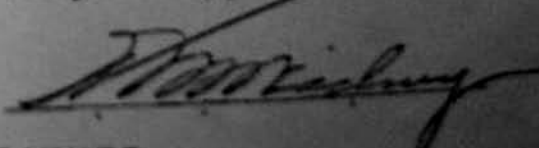
✓ Due to the tanning processes requiring tanning vats and surroundings wet, visitors are not sought after, however, we do allow Partial visitation of plant and exhibit main products and By-products.

✓ The plant was located at Frank, West Va., account of the close-up supply of large quantities of hemlock and oak bark, which supplies are now largely exhausted.

✓ Frank, West Va., is an unincorporated village located in Greenbank, District. It is partly Company owned houses with many privately owned residences. It is an ideal location, houses are well maintained and the people have much civic pride. Located on US Route 250.

Trusting this is the information you seek, we are,

Yours very truly,



NOTHING TAKES THE PLACE OF LEATHER

RESEARCH IDENTIFICATION REPORT

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W.Va. Geological Survey. By Paul H Price



Pocahontas County has had tanneries of various sizes operating since the first settlers came here. *The Greenbrier Tannery*  
The Union Tanning Company operating in the Greenbrier Valley under the Greenbrier Tannery began operation about 1901, their main office was in New York they operated continuously ~~until~~ until 1927 when the original plant burned, however a new and up-to-date tannery was built upon the original site, but it failed to operate and was idle from 1928 until 1941.

Both tanbark and extract was used from 01 to 28 when it was running at capacity, and the daily capacity at that time was about 600 hides and at that time they employed about 150 men both skilled and unskilled with an approximate pay-roll of \$ 120,000 per year. This tannery had a reputation of producing a very fine grade of leather which was known by the trade name of "Greenbrier", and was in great demand by the leather industry all over the eastern part of the U S. The finished product was shipped almost entirely to Boston, Massachusetts.

The general manager was S. E. Hench, and today a part of Marlinton is made up of the Tannery row houses most all of them are along the Greenbrier River bank on the eastern bank, this tannery contributed greatly to the growth and development of Marlinton and the Idlay District as the monthly payroll was about \$ 10,000 per month, this made the town of Marlinton grow, and



outside people to move in, this made a market that in turn caused many stores to be built to supply the needs of the tannery workers and their families some 40 to 50 dwelling houses were built by the Union Tanning Co.

This plant was idle until the spring of 41 when it was bought by the International Shoe Company of St. Louis Missouri and is run under the firm name of Marlinton Tannery of International Shoe Co. of St. Louis Mo. they having a contract with the federal government to supply them with several thousand pairs of shoes, and at the present time they are employing from 120 to 130 men and will hire more as they get production started, the present pay-roll runs about \$10,000 monthly. This pay-roll helps greatly and when the tannery whistle blew for the first time in 12 years the people of Marlinton and surrounding countryside were joyous because they knew Marlinton would again have a pay-roll which is boosting the local markets.

Pocahontas County has another tannery located at Frank W. Va. near Durbin it runs under the name of Pocahontas Tanning Co. and was started in 1904 by J.G Hoffman Sr. and J.G Hoffman Jr. J.G Hoffman 3rd and Frank Hoffman all of Wheeling W. Va. and Frank Howes and E.G Howes of Boston Mass.

This plant is located at Frank W. Va. which is near Durbin and the two combined have a population of 1000 which has access to both the C & O and Western Maryland Railroad at Durbin. there is from 40 to 50 houses at Frank

that are occupied by employees of the Pocahontas Tannery the present number of employees is 300 and the average monthly payroll is \$35,000.

The general Manager and Sup't of production is H.M Widney assistant sup'ts W.W Hoover and H.J Widney, Chemist Arthur N Kay, Chief Engineer C.F Carlson-Accountant W.F Groff assisted by M.M Brown. The president of the company is J.G Hoffman 3rd he is also treasurer, F.G Howes Vice pres. F.E Seabright secretary and ass't treasurer,

This tannery has a daily capacity of 3000 sides of sole leather which is shipped here from South America, Australia, New Zeland, Canada and Mexico besides that which is shipped from the many packing centers of the U.S.A. The entire output of this tannery is made into sole leather which is made from cattle hides only, that is shipped to all <sup>Shoe</sup> manufacturing centers ~~XXX~~ here in the U.S.A besides some is shipped abroad to be used there.

These two tanneries not only furnish employment to several hundred of Pocahontas County men but this tanning industry located as they are furnish a market for the surplus commodities of both Edray and Greenbank Districts and have contributed greatly to the growth of the two sections of the county as Frank has grown from a farming section to a town of over 400 population this has meant more schools and larger ones for which Pocahontas is anxious. Therefore be it said that these two tanneries as permanent industries have contributed more to the growth of Pocahontas County than any other ent-

Smith Hillsboro. W. Va. Pocahontas Co.  
prise so far started and not just alone the people of Pocahontas as these  
tanneries have helped keep our much needed rail roads operating within our  
borders, from the taxes paid by the employees new roads and schools have been  
built and maintained, which has contributed greatly to the growth of the county  
as our good roads and our beautiful scenery has induced many tourists to travel  
through our county and state and they spend much money at different centers  
in the county.

So be it said that tanneries were started in Pocahontas County by the  
first settlers and are still operating within our borders today.

Information-Calvin W Price. Marlinton. W. Va.

H. M Widney. Frank. W. Va.

W. Va. Geological Survey. By Paul H Price.

West Virginia Writers' Project

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merce And Industry. Samuel G Smith. Hillsboro. W. Va. Pocahontas County.

The first tannery or old time Tan Yard of much size was erected by James Smith who came to Pocahontas County from the state of Virginia and near Staunton, he having learned the tanners trade there and set out across the Allegheny mountain for a country suitable for the location of a tannery the site he chose was along the Seneca Indian trail and later became known as Millpoint and it was at this point that he stopped rigged up a corn mill and a Tan Yard this was about 1828 to 30 and the tannery was located between Stamping Creek and the foot of the hill near the C.M Wallace residence and it was here that James Smith put into practice what he had learned in Va. as he had learned the tanners trade there from an old tanner with years of experience.

From this James Smith to 1941 we have had four generations of Smiths that were tanners Isaac a son of James had a tanyard, his son Edgar followed his ancestors and he too was a tanner and today we find his son Benton with an up to date tannery on Route 219 near the Marvin Chapel Church and the Ruckman Schoolhouse, the building is a cement block structure with concrete vats, his output of finished leather is between 350 and 450 hides a year some of which are tanned with the hair on while the rest are made into leather of one kind and another as most of the deer hides are bought by craftsman who make leather goods by hand as some of them are made into leather jackets that are known as the buckskin jacket. Most of the Smith Tannery leather is bought by makers of high priced le-

--- Tannery ---  
Agriculture And Industry. Samuel G Smith Hillsboro. W. Va. Pocahontas County.

goods as they prefer the slow process tanning as it takes 6 months to tan a hide and some longer, the bark used is a local product as he uses Chestnut Oak bark that is dried and ground in a crude grinding machine of his own make using parts of an old grinder used by his grandfather The late Isaac Smith, that had a tan yard on the Greenbrier River between Watoga and the mouth of Stamping Creek, this yard was built by James Smith after he left Millpoint about 1860.

James Smith had 5 boys of these 3 were tanners Isaac, Jacob and Joseph William was a harness and saddle maker and Pleas was a doctor, Isaac operating at his fathers yard on the river, Jacob had a tan yard at Edray and Joseph S. had a tan yard on his farm in the glade pasture near his residence now occupied by E.P Kramer.

Most of the leather tanned by the Smiths was either made up into shoes or put into harness and saddles however some of the leather was bought for use elsewhere in the state by shoemakers and harness makers.

42 Another tan yard of notice was built and run by the late George R Curry and Ellis McCarty of the Levels District it was built on the Curry farm on a small stream that finally sank into the mountain near the Poor Farm, this is on the road leading to Beard and Denmar the Curry farm is now owned by Richard McCarty. Curry was a shoemaker by trade therefore had a ready market for his leather by making it into shoes and selling them at that time most men wore boots and Curry was known for his long wearing shoes and boots, besides the leather he about the year 1880, S. V. ...

side into harness and repair work on shoes harness. This tannery was being operated in the 80s and early 90s.

X Often times the vats were visited when the leather was ready to come out to be worked and finished these visitors always picked the best side of leather they could find, the tanner would miss his leather but very seldom knew where it went as this always took place at night this got to be a regular practice and no doubt caused some of these tan yards to cease operation all these tan yards were in Little Levels District but the one operated by Jacob Smith at Edray.

3 The first tannery or old time tan Yard of any size in the upper end of the county was near Greenbank where first class upper and sole leather was made by Charles P Brown this was about 1850 he operated here for a time but sold out and moved over on North Fork and located another tannery this tannery was kept in operation until about 1870 when he quit the tanners trade and followed stonemason work the rest of his life, his old homestead is now owned by his grand son Walter Brown.

Shortly after this tannery went out of business George Curry started a tan yard in the town of Greenbank he operated here for a time and moved to Little Levels District not far from Hillsboro and opened up a tan yard leaving the one at Greenbank to his brother Jas. H Curry who operated it for years using his finished leather in shoes and harness.

About 1889 S. J. Sutton, F. C. Sutton and O. W. Ruckman formed a partner-  
about the year 1889, S. J. Sutton, F. C. Sutton and O. W. Ruckman formed a partner-



doing business under the firm name of Sutton, Ruckman & Company, and built the largest old time tannery that was in the county at that time. At this tannery they turned out several hundred finished sides of leather that they used in making shoes and harness they specialized in heavy logging harness as the lumber business was at high tide at this time, some of these harness are still in use by farmers around Greenbank as they were the best of harness made from the best of leather.

This tannery was on the S. J. Sutton farm on North Fork who settled here about 1870 and was part of the Godlip Hartman tract granted to him in 1804 for a sugar camp this Sutton homestead is now owned by the heirs of the late F. C. Sutton.

An up to date and modern tannery is now operated by Kerth Snyder on a branch of Duncans Run he buys raw green hides and after they are tanned sells part of the leather but a greater part is used by him in harness and repair work however he does lots of custom work tanning for half of the leather the farmer using his part for repair work to his harness and any other use that can be found for leather on the farm as the leather tanned by Benton Smith at Millpoint and Kerth Snyder at Greenbank has more life and will outwear most leather that is tanned by the quick process and shipped in to the county the main trouble is getting hides that have been properly skinned and handled.

Along with this tanning comes the sheep pelt which when properly handled about the year 1889, S. J. Sutton, F. C. Sutton,



ried and finished makes a beautiful rug or chair back and cushion or for the car seat Benton Smith specializes in tanned Sheep hides these he sells to the tourist trade from this state and many others from coast to coast also Deer and Bear hides tanned with the hair on are bought by the traveling motorist as Benton runs a filling station along with his tannery and his tanning has attracted the tourist ~~XXXX~~ passing through W.Va.and Pocahontas County and in this way he has a market for his products as he not only sells leather but makes fancy belts that are bought by the traveling public.

Benton Smith is one of the first enrolled members in the Associated Craftsmen of W.Va.a newly organized guild of native craftsmen whose handwork has character and integrity,the association hopes to provide better hides and to create a better outlet for his products.

The modern tannery or tan yard plays a very important part in the rural communitys of Pocahontas County as the farmer can bring in his cow and sheep hides and in less than a year has finished leather to repair his harness do the work himself thereby saving a considerable sum and keeps the money at home and this helps home industry in which tanning is an important one.Thus the passing of the crude outdoor tan yard to the more modern ones of today.

Information. Pocahontas Times issue Oct.31/40

R.W Brown.Arbovale.W.Va.

Benton Smith.Millpoint.W.Va.

About the year 1889, S. J. Sutton, F. C. Sutton,

March 5, 1940

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Chapter 4- Section 4 - Part a.

Tanning was quite an industry from the time of the first pioneer. Great skill was attained by the pioneer in curing the skins so as to make them soft and pliable, that they might be used in making different items of clothing, such as pants, caps, moccasins, and many other things.

The first tannery or tan yord operated by the people of the Greenbank Community was on land in the possession of Jacob Rambaugh, which was prior to 1800. The old tanner's name was Taber. He was a hatter by trade - made fur caps, moccasins, and buck skin pants. His tanning vats were large troughs, and a certain kind of bark, roots and herbs were used in dressing the hides, which accounts for his locating so far in the mountains.

The first tannery or old time tan yard of any consequence where first class upper and sole leather was manufactured was owned and operated by Charles P. Brown, who purchased the James Townsend patent of eighty-eight acres from James B. Campbell in the year of 1850, and erected his tannery that year. He kept the tannery in operation about six years when he sold out and moved across on North Fork where he located another tannery. This was at the east end of the Solomon Conrad lands. This tannery was kept running until about 1870, when he quit the tanner's trade and followed the stone mason's trade, for the rest of his life. He built foundations and stone chimneys all over the community.

About the year 1889, B. J. Sutton, F. C. Sutton,

and O. W. Ruckman formed a partnership under the name Sutton, Ruckman and Company, and erected the largest old time tannery in the County. At this tannery several hundred hides would be tanned dressed and finished into first class harness and upper leather each year for a period of about twenty-five years. In connection with the tannery, they made shoes and heavy logging harness for the lumber companies. This tannery was on the lands of S. J. Sutton.